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of Jalal Miyan or by one of the goddesses. Going into a trance these people speak for the spirit which possesses them. The other people who are present there make offerings to them, seek solutions of their pressing problems and difficulties, and request them to remedy their ills and worries. Considerable enthusiasm is in evidence among them at this time. With these exceptions there is very little religious thought, talk or worship in normal life.

However, both Hindus and Muslims have a degree of fatalism and demonstrate a spirit of resignation towards predestined facts ordained for them by the supernatural forces of the world beyond. People can often be heard to remark, 'If it is written in our fate, we must submit to it. Human effort cannot alter the will of God. What is predestined must have its course.' But this fatalism makes its appearance only when the people have tried their best to solve the problem and having spared no effort still find themselves no nearer a solution. Coupled with this concept of fate is the Hindu doctrine of *karma*. According to this concept, which takes for granted the phenomenon of the transmigration of the soul and its re-birth, our actions in the past life determine the character of our present life, and our actions in this life will determine the character of our future life. The village people clearly reconcile and synthesize these two views into a practical precept: the course of our present life is largely predestined on the basis of our acts in the past life, but by acting 'rightly' in this life we can materially influence the course of our life after death.

The rural ethic lays great emphasis on 'acting rightly', that is on the observance of traditional norms; because it is the only way to achieve happiness and prosperity in this life, and more than that to ensure the destiny of the soul after death. The problem of the future plays a very significant part in the ordering of life. Both Hindus and Muslims believe that death is not the end; there is something beyond it. Both attach great importance to the destiny of the soul after death. While the Muslim expects to remain in his grave until the Resurrection, when on the Day of Judgement he will be assigned to heaven (*jannat*) or hell (*jahannum*) according to his deeds, for the Hindu life is practically an unending process. After death one either goes to heaven (*swarga*) or to hell (*narka*), or one takes re-birth. Depending on one's actions in the past life, one may be born into one of the castes higher or lower than one's caste in the previous life, or even into some other lower species

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

of the animal kingdom. One should therefore endeavour to go to heaven or to secure re-birth in a respectable caste and good family. In the course of our investigations we found very few people who had even a hazy notion regarding the higher Hindu concept of *moksha* or salvation which secures the emancipation of the soul from all worldly obligations and ensures that it shall cease to take birth again and again in different shapes and forms. But the desire to go to heaven or to ensure a better birth is universal. From one's childhood, one keeps on hearing, often colourful and dramatic, accounts of heaven and hell. 'We shall have to account for our actions before God. We can deceive our family, our village, our caste, and even the established authority, but we can never deceive God. He has the record of every little thing that we do, and after death His agents will decide whether we go to heaven or to hell', is the refrain in the talk of most of the people when they are asked to explain their belief regarding the future of man after death. Descriptions of heaven and hell are vivid and imaginative. 'In heaven you have only to desire a thing and the next moment you find it there', said one of our informants. 'There is peace and plenty in heaven. All people live in luxurious palaces where an army of countless servants looks after all their comforts. There you have the choicest foods, and the best of everything,' explained a Reddi cultivator. A Madiga's picture of heaven was somewhat different. He said, 'When you go to heaven you have a comfortable house fitted with chairs, soft beds and velvet cushions. And you get all the rice that you want to eat, and all the sweets. And you can do what you like for there are no administrative or village officials to curse you and abuse you.' The descriptions of hell are fairly standardized. 'Hell is an awful place. It has several compartments, each one worse than the other. In one compartment roaring fires are kept eternally burning, in another there are deadly snakes, scorpions and crocodiles; then there is a large tank—several miles long—filled with pus and foul-smelling blood, swarming with maggots and hideous insects; and there are hundreds and hundreds of such compartments each with a different torture and punishment awaiting the sinners. According to the nature of their sins, wrong-doers are thrown into one of these sections to suffer the penalties for what they have done. They cry and scream and weep, but the warders in God's prison are merciless. The more the sinners cry, the more they are tortured.' The

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above account represents a fairly typical description of hell which one often hears in the village community. Through conversation, folktale, myth and legend these ideas are implanted fairly early into the minds of the village children, who start life with a fear of sin. But by the time they reach the age of undertaking wild adventures these fears are diluted, and the gruesome accounts of hell no longer hold their spell of horror over them. As old age approaches, bitter memories of failures and frustrations accumulate and the flesh does not have the energy to undertake fresh adventures; people slowly begin turning their attention to thoughts of life after death. As an illiterate informant pithily put it: 'While youth lasts, passions rule the actions of man. While property lasts, the glitter of gold makes a man blind. But in old age, man laments for what he did in his youth. With his dim vision, he can no longer see the maddening glitter of gold. Then his thoughts turn to religion.'

The concept of *dharma* is also important, as it covers all the phases of the human life-cycle and fixes several details of intra- and inter-group life. *Dharma* has often been translated by Western writers as 'religion', but this translation hardly conveys the original meaning. It will perhaps be more appropriate to describe it as '*the* way of life' or 'that which is right'. Acceptance of caste traditions and the general rules of piety, observance of fasts and feasts, rigidly following the norms governing the *rites de passage* and undertaking pilgrimages to places of worship or for bathing in holy rivers, can generally be said to constitute the *dharma* of the people. Special worship and rituals may be performed to attain certain special ends. It is through *dharma* that one can look forward to shaping one's destiny. The concepts of *pap* (sin) and *punya* (merit), and of ritual pollution are fundamental to the wider concept of *dharma*. Certain things must not be done by any member of the community irrespective of his caste because they are sinful. Murder, extreme cruelty and violence, and incest can be placed under this category. There are certain other things which must not be done by certain castes, or by certain individuals in particular conditions. Sexual relations or inter-dining with a person of lower caste will lead to impurity. A woman in menses or a family immediately after childbirth and death remains in a state of ritual impurity for a specified period. After certain bodily excretions such as those of fæces, urine or semen, a prescribed

1: Duke E-8 (1961-62) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17
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puts a few handfuls of earth in the grave. In the case of a burial all persons present at the spot take a hand in filling the grave. When the pyre is burnt half-way, or when the grave is filled up, the people return home, bathing on the way. 764

What happens to the soul of the dead? If the death is on an auspicious day and time, the soul goes straight to the Supreme Being; ordinarily it hovers round the house—mainly on the roof, above the main entrance—for eleven to thirteen days. This is the stereotype description; but further analysis reveals a rather diffused belief-pattern: (i) near the place of burial or cremation the person dwells in a ghost-like form; (ii) the soul goes to God, where according to the deeds of the deceased in his life-time it is sent to heaven or hell; (iii) it takes re-birth, often within a few days of the death—as a human being or in some other species; (iv) it can be called back through prescribed ritual to reside with the other ancestor-spirits in the house. Some of these explanations appear to be contradictory, but people believe in them all at once. 775

On the third day after death the first purificatory rites take place, involving the cleansing of the house, washing of all household linen and clothes, and the throwing away of all earthen pots used for cooking or for storing water. On the eleventh or thirteenth day further purificatory rites are performed which remove the ritual impurity of members of the household. On this day food and water are offered to the soul of the deceased, near relations have a hair-cut and bath (on the death of the father or mother all the hair on the head as well as moustache and beard must be shaved) and a feast is given. Among the higher castes a Brahmin belonging to one of the nearby villages comes and conducts the rites on this day; others follow their own caste customs. These higher castes collect the bones from the cremation ground and immerse them in a holy river—generally in the Godavari, which is the nearest to Shamirpet, but in exceptional cases in the Ganges, which is regarded as the holiest of all rivers by the Hindus all over India. As pointed out earlier, in the Petramasa fortnight water is offered to the ancestor-spirits; and during the first Petramasa after death the soul of the deceased is invited to 'come back' and is lodged with the spirits of the other ancestors in one corner of the house. 768 765 769

Abnormal deaths require a special treatment. A woman dying 800

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Abnormal deaths ... special treatment. A woman dying
766 in pregnancy, a young man dying without sexual satisfaction, or a person dying without having satisfied any of his deep cravings, will all experience difficulty in their rehabilitation in the supernatural world, and their souls will keep on returning to the world
• [775] of the living periodically. These are the persons who often turn into ghosts, reside permanently in the village and create difficulties in the normal life of the community. To undo their evil special skills must be employed.

764 Muslim death customs differ from those of the Hindus. The toes of the corpse are tied together with a cord; and a small bundle of salt is placed on the stomach to prevent its swelling. Friends and relations gather together and make preparations for the funeral. A new cloth, to cover the body, is bought, and the communal wooden box used for carrying the dead to the graveyard is requisitioned. The corpse of a man is covered with three pieces of cloth; that of a woman with five pieces. Camphor powder is sprinkled on the forehead, eyes, palms and legs of the deceased. It is customary to sprinkle some perfume also. Relations and friends have a last look at the deceased, and then put the corpse in the wooden box. The box is lifted by four men, and carried to the mosque by the male relations and friends. As they go, people keep on repeating, 'There is no god except Allah'. Funeral prayers are said there, and the procession resumes its journey towards the graveyard. The corpse is put in the grave, passages from the Koran are read, and then the grave is filled up. All those who accompany the bier put some earth in the grave, reciting passages from the Koran. When this has been done, all step forty paces from the burial place, and return to it again saying prayers (*fatiha*) for
765 the deceased and invoking the Almighty's blessings for him. For two days after the death 'there must be no fire in the hearth', and food for the bereaved family is sent by near relations. On the third day prayers are said in the mosque and, later, flowers are placed on the grave by the relations of the deceased. This is done on the tenth day also. On the fortieth day all those who have participated in the funeral assemble together. Prayers are said again, and some people go to lay flowers on the grave. This is followed by a dinner. On the occasion of the death anniversary, flowers are again laid on the grave, prayers said, and a dinner is given in memory of the deceased.

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techniques are employed: *mantram* (chants and spells), *yantram* (use of secret formulae and designs) and *chetla kriya* (counter black magic). Amateur practitioners succeed in some cases, but all difficult cases require the intervention of an established specialist. The techniques of these specialists are their closely guarded secrets.

In Shamirpet eleven people claim some knowledge of these techniques; although only three were recognized as having 'real and effective powers'. One person who claimed to be an expert in *chetla kriya*—powerful enough to use black magic as well as to counteract it—died, when this research was in progress.

Fourteen women had some suspicion of witchcraft against them, only two being regarded as established witches. A census of ghosts was difficult, but we listed more than forty of them. Four ghosts were particularly feared. The hillock to the north-west of the village was believed to be the abode of innumerable ghosts, but now it is inhabited by the ghost of a Reddi woman who died in pregnancy. She is known to have attacked several women and children. A Madiga woman who committed suicide by jumping in the well of their settlement also became a ghost. At first she went out of the village and troubled her daughter, but on being 'driven away' from there she is believed to have come back to Shamirpet. The dread of the village, however, is the ghost of a Reddi agriculturist who dwells in the eastern side of the village. Even tough young people are afraid to go 'to his place' at mid-day, dusk or late at night. A young Muslim who died without sex experience is alleged to have interfered with many young women. No effective checks have been improvised so far to keep these ghosts under control. Many others 'have been tamed'. They were the ghosts of persons from the following categories:

(*a*) Persons too much attached to sex, wealth and children.
(*b*) Persons dying without satisfying their sexual cravings.
(*c*) Pregnant women.
(*d*) Persons meeting an accidental death, by falling from a tree, drowning or by lightning.
(*e*) Persons committing suicide.
(*f*) Persons dying with an intense hatred for someone.
(*g*) Persons who have been murdered.

Serious difficulties created by supernatural agencies call for some of the measures enumerated above. For getting over minor